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Vice President Biden, Secretary Clinton Honor Philanthropists for Work to Eradicate Hunger

By MacKenzie C. Babb | Staff Writer |

Washington — Vice President Biden and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton have joined with World Food Program USA to honor philanthropists Howard Buffett and Bill Gates for their work to eradicate global hunger.

Thanking the two recipients of the 10th annual George McGovern Leadership Award for their “extraordinary contributions and personal commitments” to eliminating hunger around the world, Biden said the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Howard G. Buffett Foundation have set a new standard for public-private partnerships for many years to come.

Also at the October 24 event, Clinton commended Buffett and Gates for partnering with the Obama administration “to make sure that fewer people go to bed hungry [and] more agricultural producers have the support they need to improve their crop yields, access markets and provide nutrition.”

The two have focused on agricultural development as a means to eradicate hunger, bringing a focus to individual smallholder farmers that has been “a change agent in the world of fighting hunger and improving food security,” Clinton said.

Clinton, who was the 2010 McGovern Award recipient, said that 60 percent to 70 percent of the world’s farmers labor on small plots and work solely to produce enough for themselves and their families.

“If we help those farmers produce more, they’ll be able to provide a greater base of nutrition and security for their families, with some left over to sell,” the secretary said. “And if we can increase steadily and surely access to markets with fair prices for crops and livestock, they may even be able to earn a profit, which they can put back into their families and their communities.”

She said the U.S. government has partnered with Bill Gates and Howard Buffett in order to drive toward that vision.

Together with the World Food Programme, the two philanthropists’ organizations helped to launch the Purchase for Progress program (P4P).

“Now, P4P buys food locally so the World Food Programme’s aid benefits both families in need and nearby farmers,” she said, adding that since its 2008 creation, the program “has proven itself a powerful tool

to help break the cycle of both hunger and poverty.”

Additionally, Buffett and Gates have partnered with the Obama administration’s Feed the Future initiative, for which the U.S. government has pledged at least \$3.5 billion over the next three years to help the nearly 1 billion people currently suffering from hunger while working to find sustainable solutions to the hunger crisis.

Biden said international partners have committed another \$18.5 billion to this initiative, which focuses “not just on today’s desperate needs, but on anticipating and preventing tomorrow’s challenges with programs that emphasize nutrition, research and development, and conservation and that unleash the productivity of women.”

The vice president said this approach not only benefits people in vulnerable countries, but also the international community because food security is closely linked with political stability and global security.

Clinton said public- and private-sector efforts to fight hunger are now focused on the Horn of Africa, where more than 13 million people are at risk of starvation and malnutrition. She said the U.S. government has already committed nearly \$650 million for food and humanitarian assistance, and has announced it will provide an additional \$100 million for drought-affected areas in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia.

She emphasized that, in finding both short- and long-term solutions to hunger, the U.S. government depends largely on its partnerships with the private and philanthropic sectors.

Biden and Clinton were joined by U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Administrator Rajiv Shah and World Food Programme Director Josette Sheeran for the annual global hunger conference.

U.S.-China Relationship Is Evolving, Diplomat Says

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer

Washington — Today’s relationship between the United States and China is evolving in a period of extraordinary energy and change in international politics and economics, says Deputy Secretary of State William Burns.

“Shifts in the global economy have created new centers of economic wealth and influence, and emerging powers — from India to Indonesia, from South Africa to Brazil — are making their voices heard,” Burns said. “We continue to witness new eruptions of the universal human struggle for freedom, as profound change comes to the Middle East and North Africa.”

"At the same time, we face emerging challenges unbound by geographic borders or political systems, from proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and cybercrime to infectious disease, piracy and climate change," he said.

Burns addressed some of those changes and challenges October 24 at the 5th Biennial U.S.-China Relations Conference hosted by Texas A&M University, which periodically examines the medium- to long-term future of relations between the two Asia-Pacific nations. After his speech in Texas, Burns is traveling to Japan and China October 26-29 for consultations on many of the issues he addressed in his speech.

In this dynamic political, economic and technological landscape, the Asia-Pacific region is a focal point for U.S. national interests, and no region will matter more in shaping the events of the new century, he said.

"A healthy U.S.-China relationship is central to our vision for the future of the Pacific region and the global economy," Burns said. "Trust and understanding between our nations will be essential to America's security and prosperity and to China's as it seeks to play a greater role in world affairs."

Burns said the United States is committed to expanding cooperation with China across a range of issues, including the global economic crisis; climate change; challenges posed by North Korea and Iran, who are seeking to develop nuclear weapons; obstacles to an independent South Sudan; and maritime piracy in the Gulf of Aden. He also said that the United States and China cannot "simply turn away from our disagreements" over intellectual property rights, freedom of navigation, cybersecurity, economics and trade, and military modernization.

"History teaches that moments of great change are when the dangers of misunderstanding, miscalculation or inadvertent conflict are greatest," Burns told the conference. "In other words, we will increasingly live in a world where America and China cannot afford the luxury of quietly operating in parallel."

"If we want to avoid misunderstandings and prevent crises before they emerge, then communication, transparency and trust will be essential," he said.

TRADE RELATIONS

At a congressional hearing October 25, Treasury Under Secretary Lael Brainard said that since 2009 U.S. exports to China have grown by 61 percent, which is nearly twice as fast as U.S. exports to the rest of the world. But she still describes China's trade relationship with the United

States as uneven.

The House of Representatives Committee on Ways and Means conducted a hearing to examine U.S.-China economic relations in part because both nations have a "significant stake in restoring global economic health," Committee Chairman Dave Camp said in calling for the oversight hearing.

"Both countries have stressed the need to maintain positive economic and financial relations and to fight against trade protectionism," Camp said. "China's economic growth, and the resulting increase in domestic consumption in China, has created a large market for U.S. exports and created important opportunities for U.S. companies, farmers and workers."

Brainard said China's leaders understand that China must shift to domestic consumption-led growth, provide a secure environment for the protection and enforcement of intellectual property rights, level the playing field between state-owned and private enterprises, and also liberalize the exchange rate and financial markets.

Activists Use Info Tech to Dodge Oppressors, Official Says

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer

Washington — Democracy activists in some repressive countries are protecting themselves from harassment with technology training they received from the U.S. Department of State. The U.S. assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights and labor offered a few insights into the programs in a speech October 24.

Speaking at the University of Southern California's Annenberg Center in Los Angeles, Assistant Secretary Michael Posner said, "We've funded a wide range of programs and trainings aimed at keeping activists in the most repressive environments safe, including a number of Syrians who tell us they are using what they learned in the current struggle for political freedom."

Posner said Congress has allocated \$70 million to support Internet freedom through technology and training for groups overseas. One nongovernmental organization that received a State Department grant developed a mobile phone application that Posner called a "panic button," for use by democracy activists anticipating ugly encounters with government authorities.

"If [activists] are being arrested, they can push a button that sends text messages to people to let [their associates] know they're in trouble," Posner told the California audience. "And it wipes the contacts in their phone, which we've been told has already proven useful."

In a speech earlier this year, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton spoke strongly about the U.S. intent to provide support for people struggling to assert their right of free expression.

"The United States continues to help people in oppressive Internet environments get around filters, stay one step ahead of the censors, the hackers and the thugs who beat them up or imprison them for what they say online," Clinton said in a major address on Internet policy.

Amid recent successes in the cause of human rights in North Africa, Posner said Obama administration officials remain concerned about three likely threats against Internet freedom and human rights.

U.S. officials are watchful of some repressive governments' actions inhibiting citizens engaged in peaceful online activities. Posner said any government action of this type is a violation of international human rights law.

Some governments are adapting the most sophisticated new information technology tools, Posner said, "to spy on their own citizens for the purpose of quashing peaceful political dissent or even information that would allow citizens to know what is happening in their communities." That too is a trend the United States is monitoring.

A third trend, which Posner said has not received the scrutiny it deserves, is the attempt by some nations to convince the international community to adopt an international code of conduct for information security. Despite that innocuous name, Posner said, such a code, now proposed by China and Russia, would surely undermine media and individual freedoms.

"And it would shift cyberspace away from being people-driven to a system dominated by centralized government control," Posner said. "Not a good idea."

In her February speech on the issue, Clinton urged all nations to support an open Internet in the belief that it will lead to stronger and more prosperous countries.

She expressed the view "that open societies give rise to the most lasting progress, that the rule of law is the firmest foundation for justice and peace, and that innovation thrives where ideas of all kinds are aired and explored."

U.S., Mexico Agree on Plan to Protect Big Bend/Rio Bravo Region

Washington — Standing in Texas' Big Bend National Park on October 24, officials from the United States and Mexico

announced a plan for continued coordination to protect the Big Bend/Rio Bravo region.

They also released endangered Rio Grande silvery minnows into the Rio Grande.

The working plan, announced by U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar and Mexican Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Juan Rafael Elvira Quesada, identifies the next steps in preserving North America's largest and most diverse desert ecosystem, the Department of the Interior said in an October 24 news release.

The Cooperative Action for Conservation in the Big Bend/Rio Bravo Region working plan was developed in close coordination with the U.S. National Park Service, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the U.S. Geological Survey, Mexico's National Commission of Natural Protected Areas and other partner agencies — and implementation has already begun, the department said.

"As neighbors and partners in conservation, the United States and Mexico share more than just a border," Salazar said at Big Bend. "We share a commitment toward fulfilling a conservation vision President [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt and President [Manuel Ávila] Camacho proposed over 60 years ago. With the support of Secretary Elvira and our counterparts in Mexico, today's announcement marks a major step in turning this vision into a reality."

"Today, the governments of Mexico and the United States write a new chapter to our strategic partnership," Elvira said. "We celebrate putting into actions a model of collaboration for transboundary conservation."

"The Big Bend-Rio Bravo natural area of binational interest is a model envisioned by our presidents; it is a dream shared by many past generations and a legacy for present and future ones," Elvira said. "In sum, it is an example of the best our governments and people can pursue through cooperation and joint work."

"When you come to an area as remote and as beautiful as Big Bend, it truly changes your perception of what a border is and what a border can be," said U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Anthony Wayne. "There is a line — the river in this case — that politically marks the boundaries of our two countries. But for a tourist, for a park ranger, for a conservationist, and for anyone who has visited this spectacular place, one thing is clear: What we share here, the seamless flow of nature across both banks of the river, is far stronger and far more enduring than what divides us."

Home to 446 species of birds, 3,600 species of insects,

more than 1,500 plants, and 75 species of mammals, the Big Bend region of Texas and the Rio Bravo region of the Mexican states of Chihuahua and Coahuila provide a unique opportunity for scientists, natural resource managers and park staff to collaborate in areas that will benefit the people, the landscapes and the wildlife on both sides of the border, the Department of the Interior said.

Following the announcement, the secretaries and Ambassador Wayne participated in a wildlife release on the U.S. side of the border. Joined by members of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Salazar, Elvira and Wayne helped with the transport and release of 267,000 Rio Grande silvery minnows as part of an ongoing recovery project (PDF, 300KB) for the endangered species.

Earlier in October, Mexico released 15 birds in Chihuahua: two red-tailed hawks, two roadside hawks, two American kestrels, one gray hawk, two great horned owls, three burrowing owls and three Cooper's hawks, the department said.

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